

Draft sermon notes for 15 Oct.

Introduction

By way of introduction, modern environmentalism could be said to have started in the last century and especially between the wars:

- In 1947 in the UK the Soil Association was established, and in 1962 Rachel Carson published her book *Silent Spring*. From then, the environmental movement really took off.
- In 1967 Professor Lynn White gave a lecture when he blamed environmental degradation on Christian culture (a very good paper, well argued and still quoted - but wrong).
- In 1986, A Rocha was founded, one of the more thoughtful Christian environmental groups.
- But it was only a generation or two later, in 1992, that the Anglican Church bolted the environmental mark of mission onto the existing four, making the five we now have.
- And later still that Pope Francis published, in 2015 the encyclical *Laudato si* which critiques consumerism and irresponsible development and laments environmental degradation.

Why the history?

So you can see that, despite the involvement of many individual Christians, Environmentalism has had a generation or two to develop its ideas with very little Christian input.

So secular environmentalism defines the problems, the objectives, the means to reach them and even the words and language we use to talk and think about it.

And it's a godless movement

That's not to say it's a 'bad' thing of course!

I should declare an interest at this point. I'm a bit of a tree hugger myself.

I joined the World Wildlife Fund when I was about 9 so I could save the Pandas. Pandas were not an early crypto currency ... actually I do vaguely remember not wanting to see pandas pushed around.

I've not really changed.

We're members of the National Trust.

We're members of the RSPB

We're members of the Soil Association

We're members of Butterfly Conservation and join work parties and do butterfly survey work.

So we love God's creation. But we recognise that the mainstream Environmental movement is Godless.

Let me demonstrate how Godless it is.

Take a look at my title 'Our Environment'

I hope you find that slightly irritating.

I'd be delighted if you found it deeply offensive, though it's early on Sunday and I realise you all don't get offended as quickly as I do (which is a *great* blessing).

But the title is a lie, and Paul told us we need to wear the belt of truth.

It isn't ours and it's not 'an' environment

It's God's, and it's 'the' Creation and he made it.

Here's the plan for this morning

A. Reconciling a few issues and red herrings.

B. Remind ourselves of God's Purposes in Creation "... the knowledge of his will ..."

C. Our response - so that we can "... walk in a manner worthy of the Lord ... fully pleasing to him"

A. Some things not to trip over:

i) 'It's Our environment so we have the right to ... [frack for oil; or destroy it in conflict; or farm it so intensively that becomes damaged and unproductive; or indeed turn it into a nature reserve.]

But it's not ours:

Psalm 50: [God says:] 'For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine.'

Colossians 1:16 'All things were created through him and for him'

The creation is not yours to do what you want with.

Not one atom of it belongs to you. It's all his.

That's one reason - perhaps the most significant one - why you should consider how you treat it.

ii) 'Physical stuff is bad, Spiritual stuff is good, therefore our environment doesn't matter'

We need to be careful to avoid this thinking.

For example, you might think hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy are spiritual sins, but Paul calls them 'sins of the flesh' in Galatians 5:19

By contrast he says food is holy: 'The Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons' - and what will those demons say? They speak through 'men who advocate ... abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude' 1 Timothy 4:3

God's creation is a *physical* thing and it's a *good* thing.

iii) Environmentalists are good, industrialists and farmers are bad

It's a popular and hackneyed trope and it's not true.

In the 1930s the Nazi Party had some significant environmental proposals.

In the 1940s the Soil Association was practically run by pals of Oswald Mosely and other facists.

By contrast there are many Godly people working in industry and agriculture in ways that honour God and bless humanity.

No-one is good: before God, we are all failures. Being environmental of itself cuts no ice with God.

iv) 'The creation is all going to be destroyed so we can [insert enviromental crime of your choice] ...'

I have never met a Christian prepared to stand up and argue that from scripture. Not one.

But almost every Chrstian I meet mentions it - you know, mention the creation and you can guarantee someone will say 'but isn't is all going to burn?'

I thinke this is a non-argument.

First, because it's God's creation, and as we'll see in a moment, he has his own purposes for it, and whatever the end of the age holds, there's no excuse for trashing it now.

Not least because when we do, others suffer now and will suffer in ages to come.

But in any case, God does have a future for it as Paul says in Romans 8: 'For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.'

I found the absence of the opposite argument so surprising that I checked what a few Christians from the past had said about it, including Matthew Henry, Richard Baxter, and John Calvin. And John Wesley because although I'm not sure about his theology, I like him!

They all drew strength from the knowledge that creation would be renewed and I found the following points:

If God can redeem rank sinners like humanity, like you and I,
Then redeeming creation, which is quite innocent, should be a walk in the park!

Besides, Genesis describe how good everything he made was. Do you really think a bunch of reprobate bipeds in an obscure corner of the Universe can stop his plans? Is your God really that titchy!?

Calvin, the old softy, even had a word for the future of animals, so abused in this world but, he thought, who would also be blessed in the redemption.

So yes, creation will be restored.

Just don't expect it to look like Upper Shirley with quieter neighbours and less traffic.

And beyond that we needn't speculate.

Now to be 'filled with the knowledge of his will' as Paul says in our reading.
Does God have purposes for creation?

B. God's Purposes for Creation

(It's worth noting that the Bible isn't a big book. It's 'God for Dummies'
This is the bare minimum you need for salvation and Godly living. So this list of God's purposes is almost certainly incomplete.)

Creation's purposes are:

- to provide for our needs

Gen. 1:29 and 2.16

The needs of all - but if some of us are greedy, others have to go without.

- to be a place for us to work with God

A God who can't grow cabbages?

Gen 2:5. God didn't run out of steam when it got to growing things: he just wanted man to be involved.

Wedding at Cana: John 2:1. Jesus could just have created wine. But instead he goes through the hassle of getting servants to fetch water (at least 120 gallons of it - some party!). A lot of work, with man and with creation.

Breakfast in Galilee: John 21 "when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread". But not enough fish.

Jesus asked them to bring some of the fish they had caught. Again, God involves man and his creation. It's not the major point of these stories: it just illustrates how God does things.

- to be a project over which we have dominion

Dominion isn't a bad thing of itself.

It's just that humanity does it very badly, like it does everything else.

Dominion can be a good thing. For example all land needs looking after - even environmentalists don't just leave it to run wild but manage it for wildlife etc.

Calvin again, on dominion: 'The custody of the garden was given in charge of Adam ... on the condition, that being content with a frugal and moderate use of them, we should take care of what shall remain'

'Let him who possesses a field," Calvin wrote, "endeavor to hand it down to posterity as he received it, or even better cultivated." He added, "Let every one regard himself as the steward of God in all things which he possesses."

So use it carefully - the eco-church group are doing that for us as a church, making sure we are being frugal with our resources - talk to Victor Humphries about it.

- to praise God

Psalm 148: 'Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind fulfilling his word! Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Beasts and all livestock, creeping things and flying birds! Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! Young men and maidens together, old men and children! Let them praise the name of the Lord ...'

Rev. 5:13 'And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"'

Praise is a natural response to God for us - and creation too, in some sense.

- to be a witness to God and his Goodness

Psalm 19: 'The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.'

Rom. 1:20 'For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.'

This is not an argument you might deploy in the pub, but for example Stephen Hawking's last book was in part an effort to show the universe could come into being without a creator. He posited M-Theory, to show that no creator need be involved. You can check yourself how it was received by fellow academics.

- to be beautiful and to give pleasure to God and man

Gen. 1:29 'Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the [an]surface of all the earth, and every tree [ao]which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you ...",

Gen. 2:9 'Out of the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food ...'

Acts 14:17: 'He has not left Himself without testimony to His goodness: He gives you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness.'

It was created by a good God who loves to see his children enjoying it.

- to be redeemed by and for Christ, for his glory

Col.1:19 "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

C. What's our response?

Well I could talk about recycling and circular economies and and so on. You know what the problems are, and environmentalists have flagged up some of the solutions, which you also know (or could find out about quite easily).

But actually the problem's in our hearts.

We know what the answers are.

And - if we are convinced of the value of creation and the vital need to keep it in good shape for all to survive - then the Holy Spirit will show you what he wants you to do.

Our part is to be open to his leading and be prepared to change.

So I want to address our hearts and minds this morning, knowing that real faith is followed by real action.

Praise and thankfulness for God's provision and blessings:

Which goes without saying!

Confidence and hope for our future in Christ

Well, look at Romans 8: 'For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us'

NB because of the glory that is to be revealed to us

Paul thinks this life is soon over, then we're off to somewhere *really* good.

That's why he tells the Colossians, in chapter 3:1-2

'If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.'

Richard Baxter, who suffered constantly from illness, said 'If you would have warmth and light, why are you not more in the sunlight?'. It is said he tried to spend an hour a day meditating on God's work and his purposes, including the redemption of us and creation. He had a very powerful ministry.

Appreciation and enjoyment of what God made for you.

I don't know what floats your boat.

It might be seeing a tree covered in blossom

God enjoys seeing a tree covered in blossom too!

'Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God:
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it, and pluck blackberries'

Or it might be horse riding or white water rafting or sailing off Hill Head,

The real thing I wanted to share with you this morning is this simple thing about God.

That is how good God is.

It's a good earth.

He made it for you. Because he loves you.

Who would not want to be reconciled to and serve a God like that?

To acknowledge and repent of our brokenness and wrongdoing, is to know not only that he will fix us, but that when he does, he'll fix all the other good things we've broken too.

In the meantime let's look after them!

